**Title**: Job Ads vs. Job Posts: Unmasking the Market Inefficiency in Online Hiring

**Author**: Sarah Marie Springsteen Trumble
Founder, The Job Applicant Perspective
www.thejobapplicantperspective.com

**Date**: Revised submission 6/30/2025

## Executive Summary

What happens when job ads are free, trustless, and unmonitored? You get a hiring marketplace optimized not for hiring—but for marketing, brand signaling, and platform engagement. This paper explores how the misuse of job ads as free PR, rather than legitimate job posts for real roles, contributes to labor market inefficiencies that harm job seekers, small employers, and economic mobility.

## Background & Market Dynamics

Modern hiring platforms have made posting a job as easy as posting a photo. While this democratized access, it also created a tragedy of the commons: when everyone can post anything, job ads become a noisy market filled with low-commitment content, unvetted roles, duplicative listings, scams, and status-signaling posts never meant to hire.

This distinction—between a job post (meant to fill a position) and a job ad (meant to promote an employer)—is often invisible to the market. Job seekers can't tell the difference. And platforms have no incentive to help them.

As Trumble (2025) argues, online hiring systems have fallen into a Jevons-style paradox: as platform efficiency increases for employers alone, the overall system grows less effective for hiring as a whole. When job seekers are treated as non-participants in a two-sided marketplace, inefficiency deepens. This paper applies that same lens to the specific behavior of job ad misuse and its market effects.

**Real-World Experimentation**

To illustrate the scope of the problem, a controlled, real-world test was conducted. A parody listing titled "Assistant to the Regional Manager (Not to Be Confused with Assistant Manager)" was submitted to several hiring platforms. Requirements included beet farming, karate, and unlimited time off "you'll never take." It concluded: "Ghost us before we ghost you."

The only platform to reject this listing was HubSpot. All others published it. Some platforms allowed derivative listings to run as ad tools, even driving traffic to an external site evaluating job quality. No human reviewer flagged the content as inappropriate — yet any real user would easily notice the satire.

This raises a critical concern: if overt parody can pass through, what protections exist against subtle misinformation or bait-and-switch tactics?

**Supporting Data**

- According to Forbes (2024), 36% of online job advertisements are fake — roles that are already filled, never existed, or are designed solely for engagement or lead generation.

- Rothstein (2020) highlights systemic frictions that impact job seekers long-term. While not necessarily looking at the data through this lens, the outcomes he demonstrates supports the argument that misleading job listings contribute to long-term unemployment, wage scarring, and missed matches.

- Trumble (2025) introduces the Micah Paradox: a two-sided Jevons Paradox in which platforms that serve only one stakeholder (employers) collapse under the inefficiency of ignoring the other (job seekers).

Together, these sources suggest that the job market doesn't just have inefficiencies — it has design flaws.

**The Economic Mechanisms at Play**

1. Marketing Over Hiring: When companies treat job boards like free billboards, job seekers spend time and energy applying to roles that aren't real. (The author has even used Indeed to direct users to her website that reviews the job quality of roles found on Indeed.)

2. Scraper Inflation = Zombie Roles: Aggregators and scraping tools further clutter the ecosystem with duplicative or outdated listings.

3. Evergreen and Applicant Pools: Roles that are always open or reposted endlessly degrade trust in job boards and reduce the value of applying.

4. Scammers: This authors acquaintance, Jay Jones, has gotten 6,000 scam recruiters taken down from LinkedIn who profit via abusing affiliate marketing. Just one of those made $440,000 by abusing affiliate marketing, taking real recruiter profilers and copying them. Then sending job seekers looking for work to get their identities stolen.

5. Engagement Trap: Platforms often earn revenue through ad impressions, engagement metrics, or resume views — none of which require the job to be real.

**Why This Matters for Small Employers**
Small and mid-sized businesses — who are actually hiring — get drowned out. Their real job posts are lost in a sea of fake ones. Applicants can't tell where to focus. These businesses, which often can't afford massive branding or multi-listing campaigns, are priced out by the time-wasting noise of the system.

In sectors like childcare, where roles pay $12 an hour and need urgent turnaround, employers are forced to sponsor posts for $50/day on Indeed — contributing to wage stagnation and hiring friction.

**Reputation as Infrastructure**

The solution isn't to eliminate free posting—it's to add context. If Amazon had no seller reviews, or if Uber had no driver ratings, would users trust the system? We already know the answer. Platforms that thrive in the digital era rely on two-way accountability.

**So why not job boards?**

Crowdsourced, user-verified job post reviews—like those pioneered by The Job Applicant Perspective—can offer:

- Reduced resume spam

- Higher job seeker trust

- Better employer ROI

- Transparency for workforce development partners

**Conclusion**

Job ads are not inherently bad. But when platforms blur the line between a post meant to hire and a post meant to market, they undermine their own purpose. This is not just a UX problem. It's a market design flaw.

It's time to stop treating job seekers like broken employees. They are consumers in a misaligned financial marketplace. And the only way to fix that is with trust, transparency, and tools built for solutions—not endless engagement.

# References

Acemoglu, D., & Restrepo, P. (2022). Tasks, automation, and the rise in U.S. wage inequality. *Journal of Economic Perspectives, 33*(2), 197–219. https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.33.2.1973

Autor, D. H., Mindell, D. A., & Reynolds, E. B. (2022). *The work of the future: Building better jobs in an age of intelligent machines*. MIT Task Force on the Work of the Future. https://workofthefuture.mit.edu/research-post/the-work-of-the-future-building-better-jobs-in-an-age-of-intelligent-machines/

Edelman, B. (2011). *Adverse selection in online "trust" systems* (Working Paper). Harvard Business School. https://www.benedelman.org/publications/adverse-selection-trust-systems.pdf

Forbes Human Resources Council. (2024, February 1). *Fake jobs: 36% of online job listings are not real*. *Forbes*. https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbeshumanresourcescouncil/2024/02/01/fake-jobs-36-of-online-job-listings-are-not-real/

Fuller, J., Raman, M., & Bailey, A. (2021). *Hidden workers: Untapped talent*. Harvard Business School Project on Managing the Future of Work. https://www.hbs.edu/managing-the-future-of-work/Documents/hiddenworkers090321.pdf

Rothstein, J. (2020). The lost generation? Labor market outcomes for post-Great Recession entrants (NBER Working Paper No. 27516). National Bureau of Economic Research. https://www.nber.org/papers/w27516

Trumble, S. (2025). The two-sided Jevons paradox of digital labor markets: Why hiring platforms fail when job seekers are treated as non-participants. *SSRN*. https://ssrn.com/abstract=5327753

Trumble, S. (2025). Job seeker field experiment: "Assistant to the regional manager (not to be confused with assistant manager)". Unpublished manuscript.